2nd Nova Scotia Immigrant Women's Round Table

A Summary Report

Nova Scotia
Advisory Council on
the Status of Women

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Executive Summary

On February 22nd, 2006, the Nova Scotia Office of Immigration, the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women, the Atlantic Metropolis Centre of Excellence - Gender / Immigrant Women Domain, and the YMCA Centre for Immigrant Programs, brought 62 immigrant women together from the Halifax Regional Municipality area to discuss their views and experiences settling and living in Nova Scotia.

This was the second time immigrant women had come together, as their input had also been sought during the development of the province's Immigration Strategy. The second round table endeavoured to find out more about the experiences of immigrant women by consulting with a larger and more diverse group.

Though the issues and suggestions the women mentioned were many and varied, covering 21 separate themes in fact, there were certain issues that came up in discussion groups time and time again. The most common issues mentioned were those that related to:

- barriers to the recognition of international professional credentials and previous work experience
- finding employment, along with finding employment with an adequate salary
- accessing English-language training for adults, children and youth
- lack of access to information on a wide variety of subjects that would be helpful to immigrants, prior to arrival, during the first few weeks after arrival, and as they settle in Nova Scotia

This document will be distributed to all participants, to the partner organizations who co-hosted the round table, as well as to other settlement organizations and relevant federal and provincial departments and agencies.

Many helpful suggestions were made during the round table. An action plan incorporating the suggestions will need to be developed with the relevant partners. Nova Scotia Office of Immigration policies and support for programming must be guided by the principles of fairness and inclusiveness and be responsive to the needs of immigrant women living in Nova Scotia.

While some of the suggestions can be addressed through the Nova Scotia Office of Immigration, others may be better addressed through the development of partnerships with federal and provincial government departments and agencies as well as community, public and private sector organizations.

Introduction

Background

In October 2004, the first Nova Scotia Immigrant Women's Round Table was held at Saint Mary's University and the information from this round table was included in the development of Nova Scotia's Immigration Strategy. The first round table was organized by the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women and the Atlantic Metropolis Centre of Excellence - Gender / Immigrant Women Domain.

The second Immigrant Women's Round Table was convened so that participants could provide information to help the Nova Scotia Office of Immigration and its partners with future programming to assist immigrant women and their families better settle and live in Nova Scotia.

Participant Recruitment

Two identical sessions of this second round table were held on February 22, 2006: one in the afternoon at the Nova Scotia Office of Immigration, and one in the evening at Clayton Park Junior High School. Thirty-two participants attended the afternoon session and 30 attended the evening session.

Participants from the round table held in October 2004 were invited along with new participants, who were primarily recruited from the YMCA Centre for Immigrant Programs and the Halifax Regional School Board Adult ESL program.

In this second round table, every effort was made to invite new participants from a variety of countries and immigration categories (e.g., family class, refugee class, etc.). As well, organizers wanted to ensure the participation of women who had been living in Nova Scotia for varying lengths of time.

Participants were pre-assigned to one of two groups, those that had lived in Nova Scotia for less than two years and those that had lived in Nova Scotia for more than two years. These two groups were further split into two to allow for smaller group discussions (though in the afternoon, due to the numbers, there was one group of participants who had lived in Nova Scotia for less than two years and three groups of participants who had lived in Nova Scotia for more than two years).

As indicated in Table 1, of the 62 participants, there were 21 who had lived in Nova Scotia for less than two years and 41 who had lived in Nova Scotia for more than two years.

Table 1: Participant length of time living in Nova Scotia

	Length of time in Nova Scotia	
	Less than 2 years	**More than 2 years**
Afternoon round table	11	21
Evening round table	10	20
Total	21	41

Table 2 provides an overview of the different immigration categories of the participants who came from 30 different countries. The participants were currently living in the following areas of Nova Scotia: 49 in Halifax, 7 in Bedford, 5 in Dartmouth and 1 in Beechville.

Table 2: Participant immigration category

	Afternoon round table	**Evening round table**	**Total**
Permanent resident – Family Class	8	11	19
Permanent resident – Refugee Class	5	5	10
Permanent resident – Skilled Worker Class	3	9	12
Permanent resident – Economic Class: Business	3	1	4
Permanent resident – Economic Class: Provincial Nominee	4	0	4
Canadian Citizen	9	0	9
Participant did not specify	0	4	4
Total	32	30	62

Discussion Questions
An experienced facilitator led each of the discussion groups and note-takers recorded all discussions. Each group was asked the same four questions:

1. *As an immigrant woman*, what has been most helpful to you in settling in Nova Scotia?
2. *As an immigrant woman*, what problems have you faced in settling here?
3. *As an immigrant woman*, as you have settled in Nova Scotia, what experiences have you had with services and those who provide these services?
4. *As an immigrant woman*, what services or changes/improvements would you like to see that would make Nova Scotia a more welcoming place for immigrant women?

The participants were also given an Afterthought Sheet with the identical four questions, so that they could make additional comments.

Analysis of Information Gathered
After discussions were completed, organizers gathered notes from all groups, including comments received from Afterthought Sheets. Two coders coded the notes into themes. There were no significant differences in themes between participants that had lived in Nova Scotia for less than two years and those that had lived in Nova Scotia for more than two years. Therefore, the 21 themes described in this document apply to all participants. Table 3 provides a list of the themes.

Table 3: Themes emerging from the round table

- Immigrating to Canada
- Nova Scotia and Canada
- Services and Organizations for Immigrants
- Community and Social Support
- Credential Recognition
- Language Training
- Education – Adults
- Education – Children
- Employment
- Self-employment/Business
- Child Care
- Income
- Credit History
- Housing
- Discrimination, Education and Awareness
- Culture
- Information
- Health
- Recreation
- Canadian Citizenship
- Other

For each theme, an overview is presented, along with a list of the related issues and suggestions that were made by the participants. There is not a one-to-one correspondence between issues mentioned and suggestions made. Some issues that were raised did not have an associated suggestion and vice versa.

Themes, Issues and Recommendations

Immigrating to Canada

Several problems were noted, particularly in relation to the sponsoring of spouses (and other family members) under the Family Class.

Issues:

- difficulties with the long, slow process of applying for residency
- perception that immigration authorities are not concerned enough about the reunification of immigrant families
- difficulties in convincing authorities of the validity of marriages
- challenges with the federal point system and with Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) policies that increase the economic vulnerability of immigrants (e.g., "having to repay loan and travel costs within three years")
- coping with the huge changes that immigrating brings and "feeling like you want to return home" were also common
- there was a perception that immigration policies focus more on economics than they do on people

Suggestions:

- allowing immigrant women who are alone in Nova Scotia to sponsor family members would facilitate their settlement and increase their retention
- immigrants would come if lower points were required within the federal skilled worker grid
- need in-person help at CIC immigration offices rather than a phone number
- assistance for immigrants in terms of family reunification and sponsoring of family members, even after they have obtained Canadian citizenship

Nova Scotia and Canada

"Canada is the most beautiful country in the world. Not going back."

Many participants made positive comments about Nova Scotia and Canada. For example, they noted how beautiful Nova Scotia is and how secure they feel here, including how safe it is to drive on Nova Scotian roads. Other comments included how the weather is better here, compared to other provinces, and that government and public services are good.

However, many participants, like many Nova Scotians, commented on the high taxes in Nova Scotia, as compared to other provinces such as Alberta.

"Taxes are very high here"

Issue:

- high taxes

Suggestions:

- lower taxes
- include taxes (HST) in price rather than applying it after

Services and Organizations for Immigrants

"MISA and YMCA gave a lot of help."

"Church organization helpful."

"Very positive experience from the Halifax libraries, excellent space and place to spend with kids reading or using the computers."

Various types of services and organizations were acknowledged for their assistance in terms of settlement and integration and for their general usefulness. For example, Metropolitan Immigrant Settlement Association (MISA) (settlement and orientation, language support), YMCA Centre for Immigrant Programs (school support workers, conversation group, women's group, swimming program for Muslim women), volunteer tutor English as a Second Language (ESL) program at Halifax Public Libraries, CIC (particularly with respect to finding accommodation and finding health care services), churches, sponsor support groups, and doula program.

However, there were also comments regarding there not being enough services for orientation and adjustment.

Issues:

- settlement organizations need to improve the quality of their services, participants found that some of the counsellors were not particularly helpful
- settlement organization offers series of workshops on legal information - but the presenters are not very knowledgeable and cannot answer questions
- immigrants can also get help from immigration lawyers but they have to pay for the service

"Small city population but large area – it is difficult to get around."

- more funding for women and children in immigration programs
- eligibility for services is limited by their immigrant category
- lack of adequate public transportation e.g., "there is only one bus per hour in certain areas"
- went to settlement organization which referred the person to a business bureau counsellor who charged money
- workload of counsellors means new immigrants have to wait for opportunities - there is a need for more resources
- not everyone gets help
- lack of intervention for immigrant women when they are in trouble

Suggestions:

- more cultural interpreting services in schools, hospitals, etc.
- more support to immigrants once they arrive and after sponsorship
- resources and referral services need to be able to lobby on behalf of immigrants
- organizing an immigrant women's cooperative
- there are some improvements now but still there is a need for programs for women and children regarding settlement and easing integration
- more room or space and more people to support settlement organizations since they are doing a good job
- raising the level of understanding and awareness of CIC officials
- private consultants in different countries are giving false information, Nova Scotia Office of Immigration should have some rules regarding this
- more library programs for immigrants
- there should be newcomer centres in every community to guide immigrants to services that are available

"Long wait to get appointment because of lack of support."

Community and Social Support

"People nice here and happy. You feel you are in a family. Always welcome."

The participants commented on the importance of community and the assistance they had received from neighbours, friends, husbands, children and members of their own ethnic community. There were comments on how friendly people are in Nova Scotia.

Having social supports was important, including opportunities to meet new people and make friends, as often participants have left behind extended family and friends.

"Psychological adjustment in managing household in Canada with fewer resources including lack of support from others (e.g., extended family, etc.)."

Issues:

- isolation
- loss of self-confidence
- loss of extended family, friends and support - do not know who to turn to
- very difficult to settle here, immigrants experience 2-3 years of culture shock
- there seems to be segregation of groups of immigrants while there should be more opportunities for groups to interact
- challenges for children, difficulty in making friends in the beginning and lack of opportunities to make friends (teenagers, youth groups)

Suggestions:

- more opportunities for meeting Canadians
- immigrant women, particularly those at home, need special support program
- general events/programs that bring people (immigrant and non-immigrant) together to allow immigrants to mix with other communities, not only their own, including meeting other newcomers who understand
- more immigrant women collaborations
- support people/families already here

Credential Recognition

Barriers in the recognition of participants' and their spouses' international professional credentials were of major concern.

"There are doctors, engineers having to do anything."

"Husband who has an engineering degree and was already practicing back home, is now a cab driver."

"We have to start from zero - from the very beginning."

"There are no guarantees that you will get a job, even if you do upgrade!"

Issues:

- the need to recertify and/or upgrade and associated costs which leads to unemployment and/or underemployment (working below one's qualification) such as holding down labour jobs, despite having advanced degrees such as Masters', teaching degrees, etc.
- lower self-esteem
- many immigrant women have the responsibility of taking care of their children, which means that they lag behind their husbands in sorting out their credential recognition issues
- challenges to pursue studies due to being out of school too long while taking care of children
- lack of professional training, apprentice/work mentorship opportunities and supplementary courses, particularly in the health professions

Suggestions:

- promote greater recognition of international qualifications
- allow for transferability of education, skills and experiences
- lower fees for recertification or upgrading
- educate employers about the value of international credentials
- create more opportunities for professional training and apprentice/work mentorship including, as a first step, the ability to work as an assistant
- assist immigrants in adapting their qualifications, even once they have obtained Canadian citizenship
- more timely response from post-secondary institutions in relation to upgrading requirements, so that immigrants do not miss enrollment into programs

Language Training

"Taking language training was also helpful."

"Reaching the point of self-confidence is very important."

"I am going to school, I am happy."

"Children's integration helps with family integration."

The importance of obtaining ESL training, not just for participants, but also for their spouses and children, was a critical issue.

Issues:

- long wait and long waiting list to join adult ESL classes
- lack of teachers for ESL classes, both for adults and children
- absence of ESL schools in communities such as Bedford results in additional problems (e.g., with child care and transportation costs)
- women who are house-bound, (e.g., due to health issues or having young children or no availability of child care) should have some means of ESL support
- difficult to help children with their studies "without own ESL proficiency"
- feeling frustrated and limited (e.g., "you cannot express and say what you want"; "afraid to talk on the phone"; "you feel stupid"; and "received letter from bank and could not understand it")
- some communities (e.g., Bedford) have very few services in the schools for immigrant children because ESL comes out of supplementary funding budget

Suggestions:

- create more ESL programs in public schools and ESL programs for adults
- have ESL assistance in the home for special cases

"Learning a second language takes time, especially for older adults — it is easier for children to learn ESL."

- broaden eligibility and offer more ESL schools/classes for naturalized Canadians
- increase supplemental financial support to enable women to attend ESL classes (cover costs such as transportation, child care, etc.)
- open more ESL schools for adults in areas that are heavily populated by newcomers, such as Bedford
- offer not just basics of language training, higher-level and business-English training are also required
- language training needs to extend beyond the three-year period it takes to obtain citizenship. Free English and French language training should continue to be offered to immigrants, even once they have obtained Canadian citizenship
- on-going language training is needed

Education – Adults

While this theme included concerns such as the cost of education, which often was unaffordable to immigrants, participants did mention the benefits of having access to education.

"Most helpful to me in settling in Nova Scotia was opportunity to educate myself."

"Higher education is more accessible. Had a very good experience in getting son registered at SMU. The Dean was very helpful and registration was easy."

Issue:

- cost of education

Suggestion:

- make benefits available to university students such as dental, health, eyes, etc.

Education – Children

There was general appreciation, by participants, of the availability of free, public education. However, there were still a number of issues mentioned.

"Good schooling for my child and guidance from YMCA school."

"Principal of school helps us and kids."

Issues:

- transfer of credits at the high school level
- problems with placement of children in appropriate grade in schools (demotion/repetition of grades), that is, no clear rules about how children are assessed (no consistency in decisions), some children are placed in lower grades and there are no concerns by some school authorities about effects on children's self-esteem and psychological well-being

- some children with little or no previous education are placed in grades with their same-aged peers, despite the huge gap in skill levels
- curriculum seems less rigorous ("children always watching television because of more free time")
- immigrant children need more help with science/math/ESL (sometimes teachers are too busy)
- big gap between junior high and high school

Employment

Finding employment for themselves and their spouses was one of the biggest issues raised by participants.

Issues:

- lack of job opportunities for immigrants and recognition of previous work experience
- high unemployment rates among immigrants
- difficulties in obtaining employment in a short period of time upon arriving
- employment services and counsellors focus on entry-level jobs rather than on immigrant clients' area of expertise
- not enough employment assistance centres
- lack of employment within Nova Scotia splits the family, as husbands return to home countries. This, in turn, creates social problems, with families being separated for long periods of time
- disappointment as high hopes and expectations for gainful employment not being met
- under-employment and/or low-paying jobs for immigrants
- employers only consider Canadian work experience
- lack of jobs renders women dependent
- lack of services and guidance in professional career development
- the husband often qualifies first and the woman waits to seek employment until the husband has settled into his job. This waiting time decreases chances of the woman finding employment
- did not get a job or work despite employment training last year
- work obtained is often unrelated to training and background and is below level of education/training
- difficulties obtaining references when first looking for work
- lack of support for volunteer worker (e.g., no coverage for transportation, child care, etc.)

"Most of us are not working."

"No job in Nova Scotia. It's for retirement. We want to stay here as a family."

"We are not getting jobs when we had high expectations of having good lives in Canada."

- lack of promotion in the job market for immigrant women
- there are issues for older immigrant women - the older you get, the less opportunities you have

Suggestions:

- create more jobs and better work experiences for immigrants and immigrant women
- provide more employment support to immigrant women
- have health care system use unemployed immigrant doctors as assistants or even as volunteers. They could act as language and cultural interpreters for immigrant patients and gain important work experience at the same time
- provide incentives to employers to hire immigrants
- assist immigrant women in building employment portfolios to emphasize their strengths
- develop workplace mentorship and other programs to help immigrant women
- address issues of how newcomers can get into unionized jobs (barriers need to be removed)
- create more and better labour market information for immigrants
- government at all levels should lead the way in hiring immigrants and providing help/incentives to business, private corporations/organizations e.g., salary subsidies, training dollars, etc.
- assist immigrants to adapt their international qualifications to the Canadian work market, even once they have obtained Canadian citizenship
- more services need to be set up in food production/science-based agriculture in order to generate jobs

Self-employment/Business

"I made a business plan but I had no idea what I was doing - everyday I would make mistakes, I wasn't trained or aware of what I should do - tried to set up a business, didn't succeed."

A number of participants mentioned problems with trying to start and maintain a business.

Issues:

- waiting for the family business stream within the Nova Scotia Nominee Program
- lack of education/information and assistance for immigrants who want to start a business

Suggestions:

- make available loans and funding for immigrants wishing to start a business

- provide support and training to immigrants who want to start new business ventures. For example, government should have someone to review business plans of immigrant entrepreneurs
- proceed with Nova Scotia Nominee Program family business stream

Child Care

"I have babies – I can't go to school because I have 4 children, and 2 hours a week for English."

"...being a prisoner in your house."

The availability and cost of child care were also common issues. A couple of participants commented on the fact that, in their countries, children could stay at home alone at a younger age, while others indicated that they would have had family members in their country to help with child minding.

Issues:

- many women feel isolated because of their child care responsibilities
- child care and the cost of daycare, the quality and availability are problems
- long waiting periods for subsidized day care (at least one year)
- lack of affordable, publicly funded, child care centres
- availability and cost of child-care for school-aged children
- lunch time and after-school programs on school premises are hard to get into (long waiting list) and therefore cannot plan activities as have to stay home for the children to come home at lunch time
- unfavourable school hours (driving back and forth for lunch)

Suggestions:

- more child care support for newcomers
- make more accessible, affordable child care available

Income

While mention was made that child benefits in Nova Scotia were good, most comments around income pertained to low salaries and the high cost of living in Nova Scotia.

Issues:

- low salaries and wages, including a low minimum wage
- inadequate access to social assistance as well as low child tax benefit

"She is responsible for three kids and is struggling to make ends meet."

"My rent is so high. Not enough money."

- high cost of living, including housing/rent, food, medicine, dental services, car insurance, other bills, public transportation, child care, university tuition, and recreational activities for children
- dissatisfaction with government policies that are perceived as increasing the economic vulnerability of immigrants (e.g., "only being allowed to work for $300 while on social assistance")

Suggestions:

- attach a minimal pay to internships
- provide volunteers with stipends or honorariums to offset costs such as transportation and child care
- social assistance levels should be increased as should the child tax benefit
- increase the minimum wage
- let immigrants know not to spend "a lot of money first," but to be careful
- provide people on social assistance the chance to work in exchange for the money they receive in order to be independent
- provide affordable housing/rental accommodation
- lower fees for services charged by government

Credit History

Obtaining credit history when arriving in Canada was another issue mentioned by participants.

Issues:

- the lack of Canadian credit history is an obstacle to renting accommodations
- with no credit cards, items have to be paid for in cash
- like any person new to Nova Scotia, immigrants face additional charges/insurance such as hook up to phone, first oil delivery, etc.

Suggestion:

- immigrants need information on how to get credit, how to use the banking system and the importance of not spending all their money when they first arrive

Housing

The main concerns here relate to accessing affordable housing.

Issues:

- long wait times for public housing
- lack of information about tenant rights
- cost of housing, both for renting and purchasing
- lack of choice of apartments for new immigrants (often shown only one apartment)
- taxation on older homes is problematic

Suggestions:

- government should have something in place to access affordable housing quickly
- newcomers should be given more choice of apartments to choose from, not just one. Should have the option to change after two months if apartment not satisfactory

Discrimination, Education and Awareness

There was acknowledgement of the overall need for education and awareness about immigration within Nova Scotia to counter discrimination and make communities more welcoming for immigrants. One of the participants commented that "as a Muslim woman, she was afraid to go out."

"There is hidden racism. You can't see it, but you feel it. It's very hard to have "real" interaction with Canadians — with my hijab/face/accent, people pre-judge me as fanatic."

"We have resources but have to work harder to educate communities to be more welcoming and inclusive."

"Everyone needs to know that Canada needs us as much as we need to come here."

Issues:

- having to change ethnic names in order to get résumés noticed
- stereotyping – "if immigrant children have a small bruise, people automatically assume the worst," i.e., that they are being abused. This results in parents having little control over their children
- problems at school such as teasing - "nobody wants to play with me because I'm different"
- fear that immigrants will scare customers when they are placed in frontline positions of institutions. It will hinder the institution's progress
- constantly must prove self
- not welcomed as an insider
- lack of acceptance of differences – "how I look, how I dress, how I speak"
- not getting service in stores (perception that some Canadians do not want or are afraid of communicating with someone from another culture)
- accent is an issue

"Immigrants should be seen not as competitors taking limited resources away from Nova Scotians, but as creators of further opportunity. This will also help immigrant children to have positive role models."

Suggestions:

- need to educate Nova Scotians about immigration and raise awareness of the contribution that immigrants bring to the province and the benefits to businesses of hiring immigrants
- have media play a role in promoting immigration and spread the message, so should the Nova Scotia Office of Immigration
- teach Canadians about other cultures
- train health care professionals to deal with culturally diverse groups
- showcase businesses that are excelling at hiring immigrants and recognize businesses that hire immigrants (e.g., by having an award)
- ensure more diverse faces on publications
- have immigration associations conduct a special program to show other cultures
- need more promotion and marketing of diversity and training within communities as there is considerable variation from region to region (in terms of how welcoming communities are)
- police need to be sensitized to issues of immigrants
- create more high school programs around cultural understanding e.g., multicultural week to educate students about other cultures and aid open-mindedness and acceptance of diversity
- foster respect for religion, both in the community and in schools (e.g., "make a room available for children to go to for prayers during Ramadan")
- encourage Canadians to get involved as volunteers with immigrants
- increase awareness of programs that are available to integrate immigrant children and develop their self-esteem
- develop more programs to reduce racism

Culture

Participants commented on the importance of maintaining their own culture.

Issues:

- difficulty in obtaining foods from immigrants' home-country and, if available, such foods are expensive
- importance of teaching heritage languages (such as Arabic) to their children

Suggestions:

- create a cultural centre for Arabic/Islamic immigrants in Bedford
- teach heritage languages to children of immigrants

Information

"She had no understanding that child care was not available for her children at lunch time and after-school and had no idea how to go about making child care arrangements."

"I do not know what to do, where to go at first."

There was an acknowledged need by most participants for up-front information on a wide variety of subjects to help them before making the decision to select Nova Scotia to migrate to, to help with the first weeks upon arrival, and as they settle in Nova Scotia.

Issues:

- many do not know the laws and how things work (not aware of the system)
- lack of information especially in the beginning on banking and information on work or job opportunities
- children learn that it is illegal to spank and the children come home from school and tell their parents, they will be charged with child abuse
- cultural norms in school "hands off policy," and understanding parenting expectations
- some students do not know services exist. They have been here for five years without services
- sometimes you do not get the information because you are not asking the right questions
- people are losing lots of money because they do not know what their rights are
- not aware of human resource policies, HST policies, taxation policies, banking, taxes, etc.
- need to be educated on Canadian law, culture and customs

Suggestions:

- a more realistic approach to living in Canada should be provided to prospective immigrants
- information about agencies and services should be provided upon entry to Canada
- more handouts (flyers, instructions) in one's own language
- rules differ in other countries (e.g., hospital), so more information would be helpful
- provide information kit at the airport in English, French and other languages
- research/referral information centre which could also advocate on behalf of immigrants. It would be good to have a place where you can ask questions when you do not understand something

- provide a service whereby immigrants can talk to a person to ask them questions and gain relevant information
- provide a settlement orientation list at the beginning which is good to follow
- provide mentorship/coaching programs in the workplace and in the community
- give information about culture to students
- have a small office at the airport
- list of areas that the orientation information should cover, including questions to ask, and make this information available before arrival to Nova Scotia:
    - basic information for daily life
    - general orientation to Nova Scotia
    - how to find a doctor
    - how to get a social insurance number
    - how to find work or job
    - labour market information including what jobs this province needs
    - workers' rights and work-place safety issues
    - where to go? what to ask?
    - information on the rights of employees, women, and tenants
    - child care and child care benefits
    - laws and legal system, what is a crime here?
    - What is a Registered Education Savings Plan (RESP)?
    - how to buy a house or rent an apartment
    - how to buy a car
    - website addresses
    - transporting furniture from another country to Nova Scotia
    - credit/banking system, taxes
    - buses, how to use them
    - hospital, health care system
    - weather and how to prepare for winter
    - Canadian laws of all types, family law, youth law, criminal law, laws about child abuse
- have a class/program on this information
- encourage use of internet for settlement and integration information, but recognize that not everyone has access to computers and/or are computer literate

Health

While there was appreciation for the fact that free, basic health care is available to all, participants, like many Nova Scotians, also mentioned a variety of health and health-care related issues.

Issues:

- long wait times for emergency and specialist services and assessments
- difficulties in accessing primary health care, lack of doctors (both family doctors and emergency physicians)
- lack of availability of culturally sensitive and linguistically appropriate services
- perception of overall poor quality of health care (several specific examples were provided, including that doctors spend inadequate amounts of time with patients, over-prescription of pain killers, and that insufficient information is given to in-patients)
- inadequacy and lack of access to health plans and drug plans (e.g., for students)
- cost of certain services (e.g., eye exams)
- inconsistent cost and policies for dental services
- several participants mentioned the high rates of depression and stress among immigrants, especially newcomers (first year) and the difficulties associated with treating these problems (e.g., through counseling) due to language barriers

Recreation

"Entertainment – when we want fun – we can't find it. Muslim women – we can't find a place to have fun."

"All day we work and clean. We want to go out – singing, dancing."

"Very expensive to put children in activities."

Participants made comments on the lack of recreational options and the cost of recreational activities.

Issues:

- for Muslim women, lack of culturally appropriate gym facilities (in schools and generally). High costs also make them inaccessible
- activities for immigrant women such as health/fitness clubs are expensive
- lack of programs for youth
- it is very expensive to put children in swimming and other activities like karate, etc.
- nothing in winter for kids

Suggestions:

- design community recreation centres and/or have recreational activities that are culturally appropriate for

Muslim women and girls and other immigrant women (e.g., "swimming somewhere where you can take off your hijab")
- more programs/services for immigrant children and youth so that they are involved in sport and recreation activities
- more financial support for children to participate in recreational activities
- open centres for youth with free recreation/sport services to give them a way to spend their time, promote self-esteem, etc.
- establish a centre where both immigrants and Canadians could engage in activities

Canadian Citizenship

Under the theme of Canadian citizenship, participants' main concern was that three years was too long to wait for citizenship.

Issues:
- lack of clarity and information on rules for citizenship waiting periods, which vary in length
- three years for citizenship is too long
- immigrants who have become Canadian citizens become ineligible for CIC-funded programs and services

Suggestions:
- reduce waiting period to apply for Canadian citizenship
- encourage government to broaden client eligibility for programs and services to Canadian citizens who were previously permanent residents

Other

There were also a variety of comments made by participants that were not classified as part of the themes described above

Youth

There was a comment that "the concerns of youth are largely ignored in the immigration strategy for Nova Scotia."

Auto Licence and Insurance

There were several comments made about obtaining a Nova Scotia Driver's License and automobile insurance. One participant commented on the "speed and good service" in obtaining a driving licence compared to other provinces.

Issue:

- previous driving experience was not considered and therefore, insurance was high. The immigrant person is seen as a new driver rather than an experienced driver
- there is a perception that there is inequity in the application of rules and procedures by the Registry of Motor Vehicles

Suggestion:

- insurance companies need to take into account previous international driving experience of immigrants

Evaluation

"I would like to thank you for giving us the opportunity to share our thoughts and problems. I wish you could make some good changes for all of us, especially for our kids so they can stay here forever."

"Very relaxing environment, good focus group."

"We want to see the results."

"I would like to have more round tables to discuss the progress of the issues discussed."

The final part of the round table involved participants completing evaluation forms. Participants were asked to indicate their level of satisfaction with the round table, the facilitator, the meeting space and the food/refreshments provided using a 5-point Likert scale where 1= "not at all satisfied," 3 = "somewhat satisfied" and 5 = "very satisfied." Participants were also asked whether they felt they had enough time to speak and be heard during the course of the round table. In total, 49 of the 62 participants completed evaluation forms.

Overall, the participants' evaluations were very positive.

Satisfaction with the round table: Just over 75% of participants were "very satisfied" with the round table and 98% of participants indicated a rating of either 4 or 5 out of 5. Only one participant indicated a rating of 3 and none gave a rating below 3. Participants who attended the afternoon session were slightly more likely than evening participants (80% versus 75%) to indicate they were "very satisfied" with the round table.

Satisfaction with the facilitator: More than 85% of participants indicated they were "very satisfied" with the facilitator and 92% of participants indicated a rating of either 4 or 5 out of 5. Four participants indicated a rating of 3 and none gave a rating below 3. Participants who attended the evening session were somewhat more likely than afternoon participants (92% versus 80%) to indicate they were "very satisfied" with the facilitator.

Satisfaction with the meeting space: Seventy-five percent of participants were "very satisfied" with the meeting space and 90% of participants indicated a rating of either 4 or 5 out of 5. Five participants indicated a rating of 3 and none gave a rating below 3. There were no differences in ratings between participants who attended the afternoon session and those who attended the evening session.

Satisfaction with the food/refreshments: More than 85% of participants indicated they were "very satisfied" with the food/refreshments and 98% of participants indicated a rating of either 4 or 5 out of 5. Only one participant indicated a rating of 3 and none gave a rating below 3. Participants who attended the evening session were more likely than afternoon participants (96% versus 80%) to indicate they were "very satisfied" with the food/refreshments.

Was there enough time to speak and to be heard?: Approximately 65% of participants indicated they "definitely" felt they had enough time to speak and be heard over the course of the round table and 82% of participants indicated a rating of either 4 or 5 out of 5. Eight participants indicated a rating of 3 (3 = "somewhat") and one gave a rating of 2.

Moving Forward

One of the recommendations from the first round table held in October 2004 was "the Province of Nova Scotia commit itself to incorporating Gender Based Analysis in its immigration strategy. Immigrant women should be asked to participate in the formulation of the strategy, so that their concerns are addressed accurately and comprehensively."[1]

The Nova Scotia Office of Immigration, in collaboration with the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women, the Atlantic Metropolis Centre of Excellence - Gender / Immigrant Women Domain, and the YMCA Centre for Immigrant Programs have acted on this recommendation by holding this second round table with immigrant women. As indicated earlier, a concerted effort was made to invite new participants from a variety of countries and immigration categories to ensure that the information gathered came from as diverse a group as possible.

The Nova Scotia Office of Immigration will use the input from this round table to identify opportunities for partners to work together on new initiatives. The meeting notes will be distributed to all participants, to the partner organizations who co-hosted the round table, as well as to other settlement organizations and relevant federal and provincial departments and agencies. An action plan around the suggestions will need to be developed with the relevant partners. Nova Scotia Office of Immigration policies and support for programming must be guided by the principles of fairness, inclusiveness and be responsive to the needs of immigrant women living in Nova Scotia.

Some of the recommendations outlined in this document can be addressed through the Nova Scotia Office of Immigration, while others may be better addressed through the development of partnerships with federal and provincial government departments and agencies as well as community, public and private sector organizations.

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[1] A report prepared jointly by the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women and the Gender/Immigrant Women Research Domain, Atlantic Metropolis Atlantique in response to *A Framework for Immigration: A Discussion Paper, Province of Nova Scotia, 2004*